



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



# MICHEL'S AND HARDING HIT THE AIR WAVES

Lt. Governor Matt Michels (Interim Secretary for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and Deputy Secretary Steve Harding, participated in KGFX's "South Dakota Perspective" program on Monday, November 12.

Both Michels and Harding stressed the mission of the Department is to ensure that veterans, their dependents and survivors receive the full measure of benefits and services to which they are entitled. They emphasized how important it is for the veterans to make contact with their local County and Tribal Veterans Service Officer.

The two briefed listeners on the benefits and services provided for veterans, veterans employment and the state veterans home projects.

Both Michels and Harding commended local schools, community leaders, and veterans service organizations for the role they play in organizing outstanding Veterans Day programs, as well as the support they give to our veterans, our military personnel and their families throughout the year and that it is our duty - not just on Veterans Day, but every day—to remember

the sacrifices of all veterans, and to make certain that our commitments to them and to their families are honored.



### ***Inside this issue:***

SDDVA Mini Conferences	2
114th Welcomed Home	2
Military Family Care	3
Guard Haz Mat Training	4
Holiday Festivities	5
Veterans Job Opportunities	6
Upcoming Events	7

## MINI CONFERENCES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs held its Fall Mini-Conferences for County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers in Sturgis, Pierre and Brookings November 14-16, 2012. Aaron Pollard and Jon Gohn of the Sioux Falls Claims Office conducted the training.

With Eligibility Verification Report (EVR) season just around the corner, Pollard provided practical exercises and training on proper completion of required VA forms reporting countable income and deductible medical expenses for veterans and widows pension benefits.

Gohn reviewed recent court cases and legislative changes affecting various veterans benefits and programs. He also updated those in attendance on the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) and provided additional training on Fully-Developed Claims, acceptable clinical evidence and other topics.



## 114TH WELCOMED HOME

During a special welcome home ceremony Monday afternoon, members of South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Security Forces Squadron were recognized for their service to our country. The speakers focused on family support and being thankful.

With Thanksgiving just days away, the speakers focused on being thankful — thankful that we are Americans, thankful for our freedoms, thankful for the courage of the men and women that serve in our Armed Forces and thankful for the families that support their soldiers.

The 30 airmen and women deployed in April 2012 to an undisclosed operating location in Southwest Asia for six months. While overseas they performed a full spectrum of security, force protection and law enforcement duties for United States and Allied forces in direct support of Operation Enduring Freedom.



Photo courtesy of KSFY TV

Welcome Home 114th Security Forces Squadron



## SD GUARD SEEKS TO IMPROVE MILITARY FAMILY CARE

The South Dakota National Guard's Service Member & Family Support program hosted a vision casting meeting in Rapid City at Camp Rapid Wednesday, Nov. 7. The meeting introduced the idea of a South Dakota Coalition for Military Families, a program that builds partnerships between military personnel, past and present, with civilian personnel such as government services, education, nonprofit organizations, social services and faith-based organizations.

"I am excited to be a part of this new coalition because of the amount of South Dakota residents we can help," said SDNG State Command Sgt. Major Larry Zimmerman. "There are currently 72,000 veterans living in South Dakota, to include all branches of the military. There are more than 4,300 Soldiers and Airmen currently serving in the South Dakota National Guard and more than 3,500 Airmen working at Ellsworth Air Force Base."

The goal of the SDCMF is to connect local agencies and provide training to help civilian providers better understand the military culture. The vision for SDCMF is the ability for every military family to connect to the right program, resource, service or benefit at the right time.

"When Soldiers or Airmen come back from deployment, many struggle to transition back into their normal routine," said Lt. Col. Bryan Jacobson, SDNG's director of Service Member & Family Support. "There is a stigma in the military. If a Soldier comes forward and asks for help they will be looked upon as weak or it will ruin their military career, and that is the farthest thing from the truth." Most of the time, a service member does not realize that he or she has a problem. It is usually a family member who recognizes they need help, said Jacobson.

"Service members, veterans and their families aren't always comfortable going through military or government channels for care or resources," said Jacobson. "This coalition will provide a user-friendly option for military families to connect with more resources and build a greater connection between the American public and the military."

The SDCMF is inspired by Joining Forces, created by first lady Michelle Obama and second lady Dr. Jill Biden, who have met with military families, learned about their successes and challenges and made it their priority to support them. Joining Forces is a comprehensive national initiative to mobilize all sectors of society to give our service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned.



### RESOURCES

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JOINING FORCES

TAKING ACTION TO SERVE  
AMERICA'S MILITARY FAMILIES



## GUARD HAZMAT TEAM TRAINS AT HOMESTAKE MINE

The South Dakota National Guard's 82nd Civil Support Team paired up with personnel from the Sanford Underground Research Facility to conduct an emergency response training exercise at the Homestake Mine Thursday, Nov. 15.

South Dakota's all-hazard response team and Sanford's emergency response team used the exercise as an opportunity to train together to respond to the release of chemical, biological or radioactive agents.

The exercise was designed around a scenario in which Sanford's emergency response personnel noticed an unidentified, disturbing odor coming from the education and research building. Suspecting it could be a type of hazardous material, the team notified law enforcement officials of the potential threat, who then contacted the 82nd based at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The 82nd CST dispatched their rapid response package, which includes 10 personnel and equipment and transported via two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters.

"The point of this exercise is to use our rapid response package, which sends a small team ahead of the rest of us," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Alex Raber, communications noncommissioned officer for the 82nd. "They can get here and have an idea of what we are dealing with before the rest of our assets are on site. This type of response can be used for missions that are in hard to reach areas that are not easy to access with our vehicles."

The chances of the CST team being called to respond to an incident at the Sanford Underground Research Facility is low, but may become more likely as the site becomes known around the world.

The National Science Foundation selected the Homestake Mine as the preferred site for a proposed national Deep Underground Science and Engineering Laboratory in 2007.

"Our overall mission here is to provide beneficial space for science," said Tom Regan, Sanford environmental health and safety support specialist. "We see this becoming more of an educational and outreach campus in support of science."

The CST and the Sanford personnel both benefit from training together. "This is great for our team to learn from the 82nd CST. With their expertise, it gives us a sense of security in knowing they are nearby ready to help if needed," said Regan. "We also appreciate the opportunity to host the South Dakota National Guard by giving them a place to train in a different environment."



## HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES

The 2012 Grand Lighting Ceremony for Christmas at the South Dakota Capitol will take place in the rotunda on Tuesday evening, Nov. 20, at 7 p.m. CST. The public is invited to join Gov. Dennis Daugaard, First Lady Linda Daugaard and Pierre Mayor Laurie Gill as they welcome guests and light the Capitol trees.

The Capitol Christmas display includes nearly 100 trees that are decorated by volunteers from communities, schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and government offices across the state.

The largest of the trees in the rotunda was decorated by the Girl Scouts – Dakota Horizons. The 35-foot blue spruce was donated by Pierre residents Josh and Mary Arntz. It was trimmed to fit in the Capitol.

The holiday display will be open to the public from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily from Nov. 21 through Dec. 26. Anyone wishing to provide entertainment at the Capitol during the holiday season should contact Diane Kehrwald at [diane.kehrwald@state.sd.us](mailto:diane.kehrwald@state.sd.us) or call her at 605-773-5434.



The “*Mount Rushmore’s American Pride*” parade float, sponsored by the South Dakota Department of Tourism, will appear for its third year in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade®.

The float features Mount Rushmore National Memorial, along with recognizable South Dakota landscapes such as Badlands National Park and

the Missouri River. Appearing on the float this year is Don McLean, who will sing his 1971 hit “American Pie.”

The parade will be broadcast on NBC-TV from 9 a.m.-noon in all time zones, with a repeat broadcast at 2 p.m. Contact Wanda Goodman at 605-773-3301 or [Wanda.Goodman@TravelSD.com](mailto:Wanda.Goodman@TravelSD.com) for more information.

Sightseers visiting the South Dakota Capitol Christmas Tree Display, will see a different type of decoration at the South Dakota Soldiers and Sailors World War Memorial Building.

The Soldiers and Sailors Building, home to the South Dakota Department of the Military and the Department of Veterans Affairs, is decked in yellow ribbons. Deputy Secretary Harding says “the yellow ribbons are staying up until the soldiers come home from the war on terror.”





## VETERANS GET JOB OPPORTUNITY

Six veterans in the VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) got a new lease on life last month when they entered into the Homeless Veterans Apprenticeship Program and became the newest full-time employees at Black Hills National Cemetery near Sturgis, SD.

Apprentices were referred from VA BHHCS's Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program (HVSEP). HVSEP provides vocational assistance, job development and placement, and ongoing employment support to veterans who are homeless, formerly homeless, or at-risk of homelessness and enrolled in a VA BHHCS Homeless Program.

"I am very proud of our HVSEP program in the way that they were able to come together and help implement this program," Compensated Work Therapy Supervisor Rodger Woeppel said. "In particular, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists Larry Pollard and Jeff Gephart were outstanding in identifying candidates and helping expedite the hiring process. The other sites selected had months to implement the project, but VABHHCS and Black Hills National Cemetery were able to implement it in 48 hours."

Black Hills National Cemetery is one of five National Cemetery Administration (NCA) cemeteries that recently added Cemetery Caretaker Apprentices to their staffs. The Homeless Veterans Apprenticeship Program was launched in October. The six apprentices to start at Black Hills National Cemetery began work there on October 9.

"I jumped in with both feet when this came up," said Brian Taylor, a cemetery caretaker apprentice. "Being a veteran makes it an honor to lay other veterans to rest. It's a great job, it's an honorable job."

NCA enhanced the existing NCA Cemetery Caretaker training program to develop the Homeless Veterans Apprenticeship Program. The apprentice program is a one-year, paid employment training program. Two weeks after they started work at the Black Hills National Cemetery, the six veterans went to St. Louis with 24 other cemetery caretaker apprentices. They participated in an intensive one-week training program and returned for their year apprenticeship.

"They are going to go through a structured program and learn all the technical skills and the other components, like customer service. When they finish up here they're going to have a solid set of skills," Black Hills National Cemetery Director Bill Haggerty said. "Whether they decide to stay here or move on to another cemetery, they are going to have the skills and the reputation within the NCA to move forward. People there will know that these guys have gone through a very rigorous training program."

The new cemetery caretakers undergo a one-year probationary period and receive the same benefits that other federal employees receive. Those that complete the program will be able to compete competitively for future positions.

Right now the six new cemetery caretakers are dividing their time between shadowing existing employees and formal training. They will spend time with a mechanic, a maintenance worker, the headstone crew, and the internment crew where they will learn a variety of different skills.

Haggerty said that the Black Hills National Cemetery is a great environment for the apprenticeship program. His foreman is a cemetery caretaker trainer.

All six of the new cemetery caretaker apprentices expressed great pride in their new jobs and great appreciation for the VA employees that helped get them there.



# Upcoming Events

Nov. 26—SFVAHCS Flu Shot Clinic—SF VA Medical Center (2501 W. 22nd St) —7:30 am—5:30 pm  
Dec. 1—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City VFW Post—10:00 am  
Dec. 7—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown American Legion —1:00 pm  
Dec. 8—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls DAV Hdqtrs—1:00 pm  
Dec. 8—Wreaths Across America

The South Dakota Department of the Military and the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs offices will be closed November 23-24 for Thanksgiving. We will reopen on Monday, November 26, at 8:00 am.

## THANKSGIVING PRAYER FOR OUR SOLDIERS

Today we gather around the dinner table with family and friends to share good food, warm laughter, and the happy memories of Thanksgivings past. But for many families, whose loved ones serve in the Armed Forces, this year's Thanksgiving celebration will not be complete.

A familiar voice will not be heard and a chair at the table will remain empty because, they have someone far from home serving our country.

Today also, members of the armed forces will gather in mess halls or in tents across the globe as friends and comrades to enjoy the traditional Thanksgiving meal.

So, as those of us who are blessed to be with our families celebrate and give thanks, let us remember in our prayers the homes that have an empty chair at the table and also offer a special prayer of thanksgiving and ask God's Blessings for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, whose service and sacrifice will, we further pray, make the world a better and safer place. And a very special prayer dear God, for those homes that have an empty chair that will forever remain vacant and for those servicemen and women who have come back to us, may their sacrifice not have been in vain.



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